

HOW TO JUDGE VEGETATIONAL READINESS

Following are some of the things that need to be considered in deciding when a unit should be grazed:

1. Judgment should be based on the conditions on the part of the range that will be used. Examples: If a range has both north and south exposures, the south exposures will generally be ready for grazing before those that face the north. If grazing is to be confined mostly to the south exposures, grazing should be allowed there even if the north exposures are not ready.

If a unit varies much in elevation, grazing may be permitted when the lowest part is ready if the stock are to be confined there. If stock are to use the entire unit as soon as they go on the range grazing should not be permitted until the main bulk of the range is ready.

2. Vegetational readiness should be based upon the development of the class of forage that will be used. Grass is usually ready for grazing (other conditions being the same) one or two weeks before browse and weeds. If grass is the dominant class of forage, or is nearly equal in importance with the browse and weeds, it is not necessary to prevent cattle use of the range until the browse and weeds are ready. Cattle will graze almost entirely upon the grass during the forepart of the season. If browse and weeds are more important than the grass, the time of grazing should be delayed until the browse and weeds are ready.

3. On some divisions, the first zone will not carry the stock until the second zone is ready. This should be kept in mind in the management of the entire unit.

4. The ground must be firm enough to withstand trampling without injury.

5. The important forage species should be used in deciding upon vegetational readiness. Following are generally accepted standards of plant development for judging vegetational readiness:

The important grasses from 6 to 10 inches in height. Sandberg and Pendler blue-grasses should be in blossom. Cheat grass should be starting to head. Grass growing in or under low brush where it is protected from grazing should not be considered in making notes on the development of the plants. Bitterbrush or buckbrush, snowberry, birchleaf mahogany, western chokecherry, rose, currant, and serviceberry should be in full leaf, or nearly so. Serviceberry should be starting to blossom. Balsam root or sunflower, Indian paintbrush and dandelion should be largely in flower. Geranium or crowfoot should be 3 or 4 inches high. The seed stalks of yarrow should be forming.

Some plants that are not good forage plants may be used as indicators of vegetational readiness. The seeds should be mature and the leafage dried or drying, of Indian potato, and troutlily. The flowers should be gone, and the leafage mostly dried up, of spring beauty, and yellow fritillary. Phlox should be in full flower. Generally yellow violet should be starting to dry up and wilt.

Quite a number of species should be considered in determining vegetational readiness. The more plants used as indicators, the more reliable will be the results.

